

# Stephen Kinzer at FFF Conference 2008, 2 of 6

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Stephen Kinzer on "Regime Change: Promise and Peril" at the Future of Freedom Foundation's <http://fff.org> Restoring the Republic, 2008.

Stephen Kinzer is an American author and newspaper reporter. He is a veteran New York Times correspondent who has reported from more than fifty countries on five continents. During the 1980s he covered revolution and social upheaval in Central America. In 1990, he was promoted to bureau chief of the Berlin bureau and covered the growth of Eastern and Central Europe as they emerged from Soviet rule.

Playlist of Kinzer's lecture: [http://www.youtube.com/view\\_play\\_list?p=25CC550549F509ED](http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=25CC550549F509ED)

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and that's what I did in my overthrow book and during that process writing that book I began to see that there are certain patterns that reemerge over and over again they have to do with for example why we do it why do we do it well usually there's a three-part process the first part is that some big corporation finds that the government in a country where its operating is giving it problems the government of country X is giving our big corporation and problems by their taxing us they're restricting us their nationalizing us they're forcing us to obey labor laws and then the head of that corporation will go to Washington and complain that's phase one then while the intervention planning is working its way through the foreign policy process the motivation subtly changes it morphs we decide that we're actually intervening not for economic reasons even though those economic reasons are the only reason why we're ever even talking about this country but we're doing it for political or geostrategic reasons we're doing it because the government of country X is a threat now how do we know it's a threat for one reason because it's bothering this big American corporation what law proof do you want that means it's got to be anti-american anti-capitalist probably a tool of all of our enemies but these countries in most cases are only trying to build the capitalist economies that they admire so much from us what we want is to have a free capitalist system here but not allow anyone else in other countries to develop that so there's the second phase that the motivation morphs suddenly from a economic explicitly economic one to a so-called political one and then there's a third phase it happens after the intervention when it's time for our leaders to explain to us and to the

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leaders to explain to us and to the world why we did it and then usually get a third reason that didn't even come up during the planning and execution of the operation and that is we only did it to help them not only did we not seek anything for ourselves but we actually sacrificed ourselves in order to bring been good to other people I think that the American people are slowly perhaps because of the events of last few years beginning to cast some doubt on this and we're beginning to see the real reasons for these the real motivations the fact that these interventions only serve a tiny piece of the American public they don't serve the interest of America they serve the interest of a small clique of people who are making huge amounts of money from the outside world and see that the American military is prepared to serve as their private enforcing police force that is the deal that has been made over generations between the private and public sector in Washington now as we look around the world and see the forces that have shaped American interventionism and American foreign policy over the last half-century I see three countries that have turned

into obsessions for us these obsessions have completely distorted our foreign policy and come and deeply shaped the errors that we've continued to make they have totally shaken our psyche the first of course is Cuba you know it's it's kind of a laugh to look back now and see how pathetically meaningless Cuba is but there was a time when you're told Cuba was this huge threat and Cuba was undermining American power all over the world Cuba was inspiring a leftist revolutionaries all over Latin America Castro communism was a great anti-american force in the world so Cuba was one country that America became obsessed with and could cause damn Erica great damage second the huge overhang of

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great damage second the huge overhang of the Vietnam War the Vietnam wars impact on American life cannot be overstated most of us are old enough to remember what a huge trauma that was for the United States and it set in motion forces that are still shaping us today the so-called Vietnam syndrome is a very much a part of the American political psyche what it means is we got beaten by a bunch of peasants wearing BF goodrich sandals and we have to show the world that that can never happen again so we're going to go out and fight more wars and win more wars that Vietnam overhang has pushed us into one intervention after another the third is our current obsession and that is Iran we are now using Iran is the great demon of the world and the next place where we can demonstrate how much money we can spend on bombs and planes to destroy a country and then how much more money we can give to halliburton to rebuild all the stuff we just destroyed now what do these three countries have in common Cuba Vietnam Iran they were all decisively set on the course that they went off on by American intervention all the trouble that we suffered at the hands of those three countries is the result of our own intervention in their internal affairs in 1954 the governments of Indochina and the governments of Britain China China the United States met at the Geneva conference to decide what to do about Vietnam and an agreement was reached under which Vietnam would be divided for two years between 1954 1956 and at the end of 1956 there would be an election in the whole country and the winner of that election would then take over as the leader of a united Vietnam now at be

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the leader of a united Vietnam now at be just before that election was to be held President Eisenhower made a statement in which he said that quote probably eighty percent of the people of Vietnam would vote for Ho Chi Minh as their president that was the beginning of our decision to abandon an override the Geneva Accord we decided to ignore that and that was the beginning of our involvement in Vietnam week there was a treaty that was going to produce a calm peaceful result but we decided not to not to obey that because we thought we could get a better result let's have America go in we'll fix everything now why did we decide we couldn't tolerate Ho Chi Minh as president of the United Vietnam it's because we thought if we allow this election to go forward you're going to have a united Vietnam under a communist leadership now instead of the instead of accepting that we went to war we lost 58,000 American lives something like a million Vietnamese were killed a country was ravaged and our country was psychologically disoriented forever and what was the end result a united Vietnam under communist leadership the same result that we could have had in 1956 without any of this bloodshed and you know that the saddest or most pathetic aspect of this is that having a communist Vietnam United actually isn't so bad for us we're getting along with them yeah we don't particularly like them but we're trading with them we have an embassy it's not so bad the world didn't end but we had a sense that communist rule over this one country was going to be devastating for us and I remember I'm old enough to remember as most of you are the reason why we were told we had to stay in Vietnam and that's because it's not just about Vietnam China is behind all this China is the big expansionist power and

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is the big expansionist power and Vietnam is just their little cat's paw now like most other Americans I didn't know anything about East Asia and that sounded like a reasonable theory um and I still remember my shock when just two years after the end of the Vietnam War China and Vietnam went to war wait a minute I thought

they were one was the cat's paw of the other then I start reading and find out they've been bitter enemies for a thousand years but facts were never presented to a candid public because our leaders were not candid with us now let's look at the case of Cuba it's another case of American intervention gone terribly wrong when the United States decided in 1898 to send soldiers to Cuba to help cuban revolutionaries overthrow Spanish colonial rule the Spanish the Cuban Patriots we're not so sure they really like this idea they didn't know if they wanted some thousands of American soldiers in Cuba and they were very close to victory on their own well the Americans were shocked at the cynicism of the Cuban Patriots and responded by passing a law that was called the Teller Amendment so with the force of law we promised Cuba that our troops are going to withdraw immediately after we defeat the Spanish and we're going to allow Cuba to become independent well once that was promised with the force of law the cuban revolutionaries embraced the idea of Americans coming at the end of 1898 Cuba after winning the war against Spain was in a state of ecstatic preparation for what was gonna be the biggest day in Cuban history january first 1899 that's Cuban independence day for the first time q was going to become an independent country but the United States changed its mind we violated the promise that we had made with the force of law and decided we don't want Cuba to become independent in fact we're going to turn it into a protectorate and we're going to rule it directly by American military officers and later on we ruled it through a series of pliant dictators

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